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ABSTRACT

Although the old social order of racial segregation has collapsed, much remains to be done to reach full equality of the races. This article analyzes economic trends since World War II to compare the standing of black and white Americans. The findings on five basic questions of equality are as follows: (1) there are more blacks in higher level jobs today, but whites still are more likely to get these well paying and prestigious jobs; (2) the median income of black families rose slightly in the early 1970s, but by 1981 had dropped so that blacks earned only 57% of white income; (3) the poverty rate for blacks dropped from 55.1% in 1959 to 30.3% in 1974 but has risen since then to 34.2% in 1981, with the rate for whites substantially lower; (4) for more than 30 years the unemployment rate for blacks has been double the rate for whites--the rate for blacks in 1984 was 28.4% according to the National Urban League's Hidden Unemployment Index; and (5) for 30 years the educational attainment of blacks has risen, and the number of high school graduates is increasing at a faster rate than for whites even though the white completion rate is higher at 87% than the black rate of 79%. (VM)

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DESPITE GAINS OF 1960'S AND 1970'S BLACKS' PROGRESS LAGS BEHIND WHITES'

by

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Despite Gains Of 1960's And 1970's Blacks' Progress Lags Behind Whites'

By Sherille Ismail
CBCF Policy Analyst

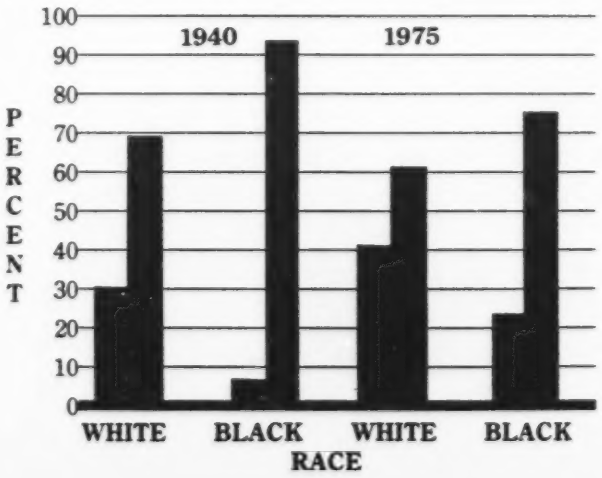
In the period after World War II the old system of racial segregation began to crumble. Successive blows came in the form of migration to the North, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, and a host of legislative and executive decisions. As one account described it, "the old social system, based on the degradation of one race by another, . . . collapsed." But even with the passing of the old social order, much still remained to be done to reach the goal of full equality of the races. Although this is not intended as a comprehensive analysis, the analysis which follows should provide accurate and reliable information of trends, and tell us whether the situation is better or worse today than it was roughly thirty to thirty-five years ago.

A. ARE BLACKS GETTING BETTER JOBS?

There are more blacks in higher level jobs today than there were three decades ago, but whites still are more likely than blacks to get these well paying and prestigious jobs.

The biggest gains for blacks came as a result of the migration from the South and the shift from the farm and domestic services sectors to the better paying goods sector of the economy. In 1940, for instance, more than 65% of black workers had jobs in farming or domestic services. By 1974 the percentage had dropped to 15%, and by 1984, to about 5%.

GRAPH 1
DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYED WORKERS BY PAYMENT GROUP, RACE, AND YEAR



In the 1960's and 1970's blacks moved into higher level jobs at a faster rate than whites. Between 1970 and 1980, for instance, the number of blacks entering higher level positions rose by 71%, but for whites the corresponding rate was only 30%.

As a result, the proportion of blacks in the professional, managerial, and technical fields almost doubled from 11% in 1960 to 21% in 1980, but seen in greater detail the gains are not all that impressive; as noted in a Bureau of Labor Studies article, "although a higher proportion of blacks could be found among the professional and technical occupations in 1980 than in 1972, they were concentrated in jobs at the lower end of the professional pay scale, such as nursing, technical trades, and vocational and educational counselling."

Thus, despite the large gains of the 60's and 70's, black workers lag far behind their white counterparts: 42% of all white workers hold higher level positions, compared to only 27% of all black workers. In 1940, about 7% of all black workers held high wage jobs. Similarly, only 18% of white workers have lower level jobs, but 30% of all black workers are in these positions.

As the data makes clear, blacks and whites occupy very different types of jobs—a point repeated in a recent Monthly Labor Review, published by the U.S. Department of Labor:

The kinds of jobs held by black workers are quite different from those of whites. One-third of black men worked as machine operators, fabricators, and laborers in 1984, compared to one-fifth of white men. Close to 20 percent of black men were in service occupations, twice the proportion of whites. Black men were underrepresented in all other fields, with about 15 percent in precision production, craft, and repair—compared to more than 20 percent of white males—and 12 percent in managerial and professional specialty jobs—compared to about 25 percent among whites. (R.M. Devens et al, *"Employment During 1984: A Second Year of Strong Growth,"* Monthly Labor Review, February 1985 at 14.)

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*CBCF Fellow Arthur W. Williams, III, provided the computer assistance in preparing the charts and graphs on the following pages.
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HIGH PAY
LOW PAY

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B. ARE BLACKS' INCOMES RISING?

The median income of black families rose slightly in the early 1970's but by 1981 had dropped to the level it was two decades ago. Black families in 1981 earned only 57% of white family income; in 1964 the rate was 54%.

The highpoint for blacks came in 1975 when black family incomes rose to almost 62% of white incomes, but since then the relative income has steadily dropped every year: to 59% in 1978, 57% in 1980, and 56% in 1981. However, black incomes have risen in the last two years, to 59% in 1984 and 61.2% in 1985, as estimated by the noted economist, Andrew Brimmer.

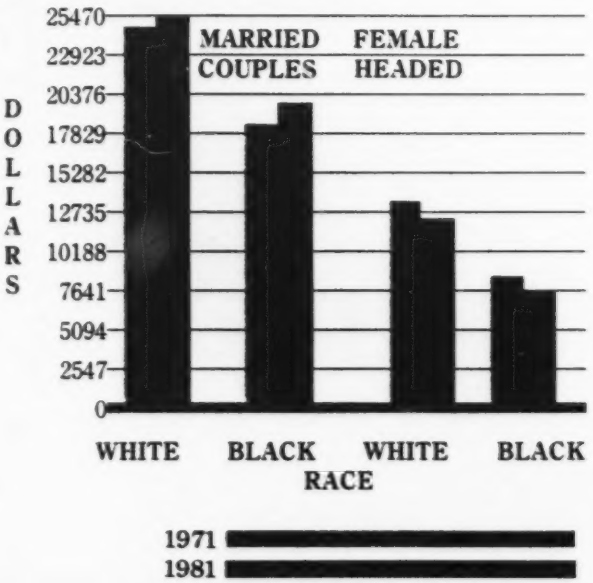
TABLE I

MONEY INCOME OF FAMILIES – MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME IN CONSTANT (1981) DOLLARS 1950-1980

Year	All Families	White	Black
1950	12,548	13,025	7,066
1960	17,259	17,919	9,919
1970	23,111	23,975	14,707
1980	23,204	24,176	13,989

Black married couples, however, showed large income gains while black female headed households gained only slightly, or declined.

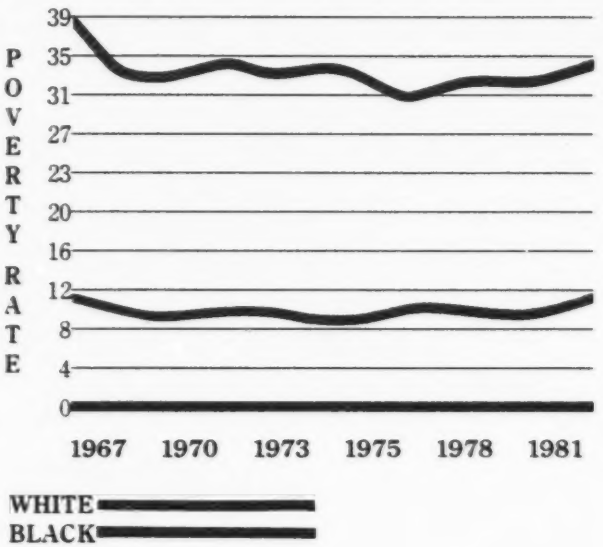
GRAPH 2
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME BY TYPE AND RACE 1971 and 1981 (1981 dollars)



C. IS THE POVERTY RATE FOR BLACKS INCREASING?

The poverty rate for blacks dropped from the high of 55.1% in 1959 to a low of 30.3% in 1974, but has risen since then to 34.2% in 1981. There are almost as many blacks in poverty today (9,173,000) as there were in 1959 (9,927,000).

GRAPH 3
POVERTY RATE BY RACE FOR 1967 TO 1981

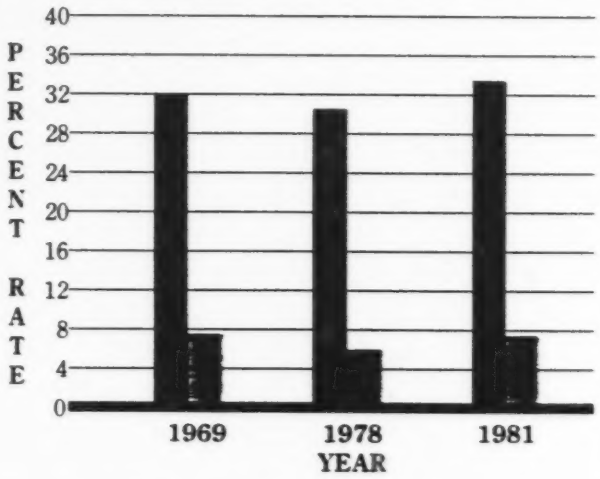


The rate for whites is substantially lower: 18.1% in 1959 and 11.1% in 1981. However, the actual number of whites living in poverty is much greater: 21,553,000.

Poverty increased sharply under the Reagan administration. In the one year period from 1981-1982 over 2 million Americans were added to the poverty rolls, and by 1983 the poverty rate for all Americans had climbed to 15% – the highest rate since 1966. The rate for whites was 12%, a third of the black rate of 36%.

Female householders suffered the highest rates of poverty among all groups. In 1981, the poverty rate for black female householders varied from 35.8% (if no children under 18 were present) to 72.6% (if three dependent children lived with the mother). If the mother received welfare assistance with no other earnings, the poverty rate shot through the roof to 97.7% (for families with three children).

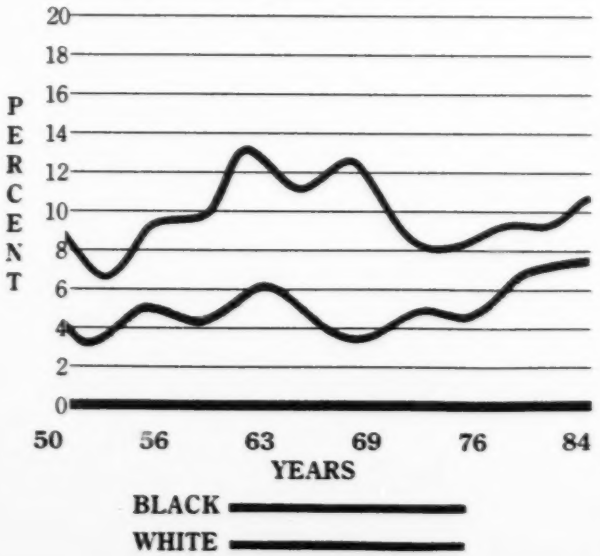
GRAPH 4
POVERTY RATE BY TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD FOR 1969, 1978, AND 1981



D. IS UNEMPLOYMENT WORSENING FOR BLACKS?

For more than 30 years, the unemployment rate for blacks has been double the rate for whites. In 1954 the rate for whites was 5.0% and the rate for blacks was 9.9%; in 1983 the white rate was 7.3% compared to 17.8% for blacks; in 1984 (fourth quarter) the rates for blacks and whites dropped but the gap was still great – 6.2% for whites, 15.1% for blacks.

GRAPH 5
AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE FOR AGES 16 AND OVER

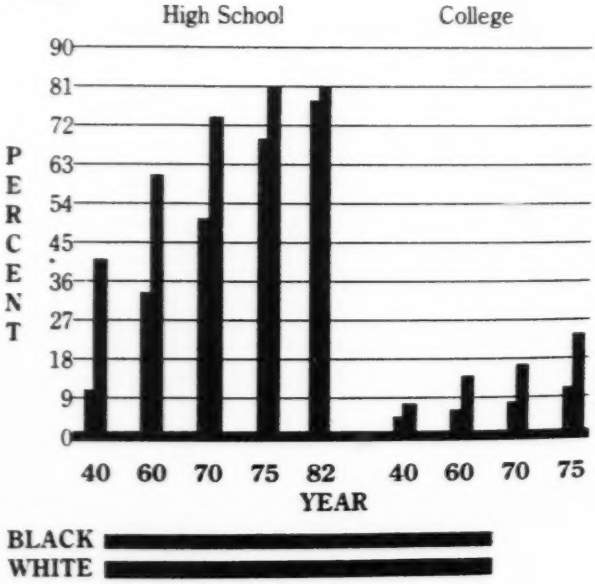


Because the official rate does not include part-time workers or those too discouraged to look for work, the numbers of those actually unemployed is much greater than the official rate. According to the National Urban League's Hidden Unemployment Index, which includes part-time and discouraged workers, the real unemployment rate for blacks in 1984 was 28.4% and not the 15.9% rate reported by the Labor Department. (NUL reports 3.8 million unemployed blacks which is double the 1.9 million cited by the Labor Department.)

E. ARE BLACKS CLOSING THE EDUCATIONAL GAP WITH WHITES?

Throughout the past three decades the educational attainment of blacks has risen steadily. These gains are especially clear in the numbers of high school graduates, who comprised 11% of the black population in 1940, 33% in 1960, 52% in 1970, and 79% in 1982. The number of high school graduates has been increasing at a faster rate than for whites; thus the gap is closing even though the white high school completion rate of 87% is still higher than the black rate of 79%.

GRAPH 6
FOUR OR MORE YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED FOR PERSONS 25 TO 34 YEARS OF AGE



Black college enrollment (for 18–24 year olds) has also increased sharply from 143,000 in 1960 to 750,000 in 1981. The total number of black college students in 1981 was 1.1 million. This represented 10.3% of all college students, and showed a gain from 1960 when blacks were 6.4% of the college student population. ■